



Strategic Plan Years 2020 - 2023

Strategic Planning Committee

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INTRODUCTION

The Recycling Association of Minnesota (RAM) completed its first strategic plan in 1998 and updated in 2003, 2007, and 2013. A group of RAM members and staff met during 2020 to review the plan and identify areas for change.

VISION

The Recycling Association of Minnesota's efforts will lead to greater resource conservation, a strengthened culture of sustainability, and increased economic viability of recycling.

MISSION

The Recycling Association of Minnesota provides leadership, advocacy, and education to encourage the responsible use of resources through recycling and supporting modes of waste reduction.

VALUES

RAM's efforts and programs will reflect the following organizational values:

- Social equity
- Environmental justice
- Foster collaboration with local community and industry partners
- Maintain strong networks and community partnerships
- Inclusiveness of Stakeholders and Members
- Recycling has inherent value
- Public Education
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- Promoting financial and environmental sustainability
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Efficiency
- Fiscal Prudence
- Resourcefulness
- Fostering a Strong Economy

CONTEXT

Recycling efforts have been largely successful with the public. COVID-19 has presented some new challenges. RAM is concerned that recycling, composting, waste reduction, and re-use efforts may regress during and after the COVID pandemic.

There also exists a lack of end markets for certain materials, including mixed fiber, organics, glass, plastic film, shredded paper, and plastics other than #1, #2, and #5.

In addition, RAM believes that, in order to achieve its mission, we must address and positively impact recycling, waste reduction, composting, and re-use at every stage of the recycling life cycle, including incorporating the principles of sustainable materials management (SMM).

On the organizational side, RAM has struggled to find and capitalize on its niche within the recycling community. Its programs have tended to be reactive or opportunistic rather than proactive with RAM as the lead on important recycling, waste reduction, composting, and re-use issues. This has led to a patchwork of funding and programmatic work rather than a sustainable funding foundation based on a strong programmatic agenda displaying RAM's leadership on important recycling issues. As a result, RAM has yet to achieve the maximum organizational visibility outside the industry - with the public, media, and potential funders, and is subject to mission co-option by other partners who seek opportunities arising from this void.

NICHE

RAM is unique in several ways. We have a statewide and regional reach in terms of membership and board representation. We have public and private members. RAM is non-partisan and is able to bring diverse stakeholders to the table on projects. We are a trusted and primary source of information on recycling. The knowledge base of our board and staff is excellent and enhances our capacity to conduct programs.

PRE-CONDITIONS THAT MUST BE MET TO ADVANCE RAM'S MISSION

The following are pre-conditions that must be met in order for RAM to promote its mission:

- RAM must have adequate financial resources to support our organization and its programs.
- We must embrace new technology and incorporate it into our operations.
- RAM must understand and meet the needs of its members and engage those members.
- We must understand the diversity of needs of both our Metro and Greater Minnesota members.
- We must forge strong, engaged, and strategic partnerships and alliances.
- We must address the life-cycle of recycling, waste reduction, composting, and re-use, and seek to influence these activities at every stage.

GOALS:

- RAM will become the premier authority and go-to source for recycling, as well as a resource for composting, and re-use within the State of Minnesota.
- RAM's programs will address key points in the recycling, waste reduction, composting, and re-use life-cycles where they will have the most immediate and measurable impact on the volume, end use, and overall success of recycling within the State of Minnesota.
- RAM will utilize its resources, including its staff, board, members, and partners to influence recycling, waste reduction, composting, and re-use policy within the State of Minnesota.
- RAM will increase its organizational capacity by diversifying and increasing its funding resources, with a target goal of a 30% increase in revenue over the three-year period.

- RAM will maintain and expand its partnership base to grow its programs, raise its visibility, and display leadership on important recycling and re-use issues.
- RAM will engage and grow its membership base to provide membership value and to involve its membership in its advocacy and policy initiatives. The target goal is a 50% increase in membership over the three-year period.
- RAM will review and strengthen its board of directors and committees to reflect and best serve the needs of the organization.

OBJECTIVES

- RAM will utilize and enhance its communication capabilities such as its website, blog, social media, and newsletter to convey current and important recycling, waste reduction, composting, and re-use information to its members and partners.
- RAM will conduct a review of its partners and stakeholders in relation to our programs and involve others as needed. RAM will conduct regular communications with its partners to initiate and implement programs.
- RAM will conduct an evaluation of its programs to determine their connection to and effectiveness at addressing key points in the recycling, waste reduction, composting, and re-use life cycles.
- RAM will identify key policies, laws, and regulations that must be in place to increase recycling, waste reduction, composting, and re-use efforts within the State of Minnesota, forming the appropriate coalitions and employing the best strategies to achieve them.
- RAM will identify and seek private and public sources of funding for its general operations and priority programs.
- RAM will develop a membership value and growth plan to increase membership value, ensure engagement, grow our membership, and increase funding from our members.
- RAM will conduct a board assessment and evaluation that addresses such issues as board diversity, leadership development, committee structure, and board fundraising.
- RAM will incorporate Sustainable Materials Management (SMM) into our programs, operations, and communications whenever possible.

STRATEGIC PROGRAM DIRECTIONS

Our integrated programmatic approach is based upon the following core strategies:

- RAM will develop strong organizational messaging and branding;
- RAM will play a leading advocacy role on important recycling, waste reduction, composting, and re-use issues;
- RAM will take the lead on developing strategic programmatic partnerships;
- RAM will continue to maximize our education and networking opportunities through our conference, webinar series, and forums;
- RAM will put a hard focus on enhancing our membership within the next three years.

RAM PROGRAMS

The Recycling Association of Minnesota has five primary conservation programs through which we will promote our mission.

Recycling and Re-Use Education and Communication

Recycling Education Committee

The Recycling Education Committee (REC) is a group of stakeholders that meets quarterly with the goal of increasing recycling and reducing recycling contamination by building consensus around recycling education and communication. Starting in June 2016, representatives from haulers, cities, counties, the state and other regional organizations and associations began discussions around how to improve recycling efficiency throughout the state of Minnesota. Recognizing the discord of recycling messages, the REC strives to improve recycling communication and outreach through coordinated and consistent messaging.

The Recycling Education Committee is a new and growing collaborative group with hopes to expand Minnesota's recycling industry and work towards meeting ambitious state recycling goals. REC is committed to leveraging existing resources, using a sustainable materials management approach, and using an environmental justice framework to guide their work. The purpose of the group is to seek understanding from key stakeholders on recyclable and compostable materials, build consensus on what is universally acceptable/not acceptable, and agree on consistent messaging to communicate in an efficient and coordinated fashion throughout the state.

In the group's quarterly meetings, REC members collaborated to craft an "Always/Never in the Curbside Bin" list and identified other priority recycling messages to help guide future campaigns/outreach. Those messaging priorities are:

No Bags and Un-Bag Your Recyclables
Back to Basics (No Wishcycling; Here's How the System Works Info-Graphic)
Stop Hazards (lithium batteries, etc.)
Universal Cart Tags and Trainings
Shredded Paper

In the next three years, RAM will increase our involvement in REC, assuming a stronger coordinator or facilitator position.

- Put RAM in a leadership position within the industry.
- Adds value for cities, counties, and our members.
- Market development will help remove volume from the waste stream, and we need to be involved.
- Increases RAM's visibility.
- Could increase member retention.

- Incorporating sustainable materials management includes recycling life-cycle.

Plastic Film Recycling

RAM is currently promoting increased plastic film recycling through its grant with Scott County. We also recently completed a grant with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to advance the recycling of agricultural plastics and boat wrap.

RAM will continue and expand our work on plastic film recycling within the next 3 years. The Scott County grant on plastic bag recycling can serve as a pilot project for additional efforts throughout the Metro and Greater Minnesota. We have made substantial initial progress on agricultural plastics and boat wrap recycling, and we will continue the work with our partners to measurably and quantifiably increase agricultural plastic film recycling locations and volume.

- Provides a leadership and advocacy opportunity for RAM.
- There is a definite need for this type of work.
- Offers opportunities to expand our partnerships.
- Offers an opportunity to both engage and expand our membership.
- Presents a clear foundation for fundraising.
- Presents an opportunity to engage members and others in Greater Minnesota.

Rain Barrel and Compost Bin Sales

RAM will continue our rain barrel and compost bin sales. We will search for ways to lessen RAM's staff time devoted to this program by seeking more involvement by partners where RAM plays more of a coordinator role. Compost bins are more closely tied to RAM's mission than rain barrels, but there is a lot of demand for rain barrels and compost bins alike.

- Rain barrel and compost bin sales provide a strong revenue source for RAM.
- There is currently high market demand.
- Build strong relationships with our county, city, and private partners.

End Market Development and Entrepreneurship Promotion

There is a recognized need for improving or creating new markets for existing recyclable materials. The greatest need is in markets for high-volume materials such as plastic bags, mixed paper, organics, glass, and plastics other than #1, #2, and #5.

RAM could spearhead initiatives to encourage and provide seed money to entrepreneurs providing services in our target end markets.

- Improved markets would increase economic stability and sustainability.
- Provides a leadership role for RAM.
- Programs are likely very fundable.
- RAM is promoting the economic portion of its mission.

Conferences, Webinars, and Forums

RAM will continue to host its annual conference. The conference provides members, partners and other professionals with unique educational and networking opportunities. Many members renew at the time of the conference. RAM will plan to host its 2021 conference in the spring of 2021, conditions permitting. The COVID pandemic has made it difficult to plan, but RAM will move forward and take action to hold the conference as planned.

RAM will continue its webinar series with SWANA and SWAA, pending evaluation after the first series of 2020. One of the priorities for RAM to promote its mission is to embrace and expand its use of technology. We will also reinstate our educational forums featuring current and timely topics of interest.

- RAM will host an annual educational series either through an in-person conferences or online webinar series, depending upon the circumstances.
- RAM will host quarterly webinar forums on topics of interest.
- RAM will use its events to strengthen and grow membership.
- RAM will expand its partner and funder base through sponsorships.

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

RAM will enhance its communications and outreach by conducting a branding and messaging campaign within the next three years. This will help raise the organization's visibility and provide a consistent and memorable message and visuals for RAM.

RAM will maintain the excellence of its weekly newsletter and will expand its use of and following on social media. RAM will continue to recruit contributors of timely and relevant material for its newsletter.

RAM will also highlight its successes in an annual report.

RAM staff, communications and marketing committee, and board will develop and implement a Communications Plan for the next three years.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The RAM Board of Directors will establish a board development committee to examine the board and create a plan for board development and succession planning within the next three years.

- Create a board development committee or board affairs committee to address governance issues.
- Refine and clarify board bylaws and policies pertaining to good governance, including definition of terms, establishment of term limits, completing a board profile matrix, and reviewing and establishing board policies such as conflict of interest policies, board nomination procedures, and board financial commitment forms.

- Review the mission, structure, and operations of board committees.

STRENGTHENING MEMBERSHIP

RAM currently has 331 members. While many members find value in our conference and communications, RAM has struggled to find a definitive value proposition for its members.

In the next three years, RAM will re-evaluate the strategic composition of its membership and will work to strengthen and grow our membership by:

- Re-establishing a membership committee.
- Identify our target market or markets.
- Conduct a member survey to identify member needs and satisfaction levels.
- Create an online membership directory.
- Highlight member activities and accomplishments both internally and to the public.
- Create a Greater Minnesota advisory committee from our membership.
- Review member dues structure and develop fundraising strategies for membership.

In the next three years, RAM staff, its membership committee, and board will develop and implement a Membership Plan for the organization, which will include a target for membership growth within the next three years, currently estimated at 50%.

RESOURCES AND FUNDRAISING

RAM is currently in a stable financial position. However, the organization has often raised funds and determined its priorities in an opportunistic, rather than strategic, fashion.

RAM will seek to increase and diversify its financial resources to increase capacity and ensure sustainability within the next three years. Working with the board of directors and the financial and grants committees, the staff will work to raise both operational and program funds from a variety of sources:

- RAM will create a common grant template for foundation and corporate grants.
- RAM will create a fundraising strategy around its programs, with a focus on a flagship program such as market development and end-market promotion.
- RAM will incorporate fundraising goals into its annual budget.
- RAM will create a current funding prospect list.
- RAM will strengthen and grow its conference and event sponsorships.
- RAM will create a strategy to increase fundraising from its members, including its Benefactor program.

RAM staff, grants/ fundraising committee, and the board of directors will develop a fundraising plan for the next three years, with an estimated target goal of increasing revenues 30% over the next three years.

FINANCIAL

The Recycling Association of Minnesota will maintain and strengthen its current good financial health. We will employ fiscal management and accounting procedures that reflect the current needs of our organization. We will continue operating according to mandates of state and federal laws, generally accepted accounting principles, and in recognition of operational trends within the nonprofit sector.

OPERATIONS

We will adapt our organizational operations, including staffing, equipment, and other needs, to reflect the changing needs of our organization. Our operations will support sustainable organizational growth. We will raise the necessary funds to support this growth.

MONITORING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Recycling Association of Minnesota is committed to achieving the goals we have set for ourselves in our strategic plan. The strategies outlined in the plan will guide our decisions and help us set priorities. However, we recognize that, in order to be successful, we must revisit the plan on a regular basis to measure our progress. It is also important for us to view the strategic plan as flexible and be prepared to adapt to changing or unexpected conditions. As such, we must revisit the plan in regular planning meetings. The board will review progress on a quarterly basis. The Executive Director will provide the board with quarterly reports connecting activities with progress on priorities identified in the strategic plan. RAM will make changes to the strategic plan and/or alter our activities as necessary.